

House Bill 71
January 9, 2007
Presented by Chris Smith
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Chief of Staff of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in support of HB 71 that requires FWP to implement a trapper safety and education course for first time trappers 12 years of age or older.

For a variety of reasons, trapping does not enjoy the public support that hunting does. As such, it is important to take a proactive approach to dealing with some of the issues surrounding trapping. FWP firmly believes that a mandatory trapper safety and education course is the best answer to address some of these issues and to ensure trapping continues to be part of our rich wildlife heritage.

Currently, the Montana Trappers Association conducts a voluntary trapper education program in cooperation with FWP. Approximately 200 youth take this course each year. The Department's support for mandatory trapper education is an acknowledgement of the quality of the current program and recognizes the value of education for all new trappers. Similar to the results of mandatory hunter education and bow hunter education, HB 71 would ensure trappers are knowledgeable and skilled.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has a state of the art model trapper safety and education curriculum that states like Montana can utilize to meet their specific needs. FWP proposes to adopt this curriculum and work with the Montana Trapper's Association to offer a convenient course for participants. This standardization would allow a trapper certified in Montana to be recognized by other states and provinces as having received trapper education. This is the same level of recognition that the hunter safety and bow hunter safety education programs enjoy.

HB 71 provides a few specific exceptions to the requirement including:

1. previously licensed trappers,
2. landowners trapping on their own land,
3. youths trapping mink and muskrat under the supervision of an older, licensed trapper, and
4. individuals who do not intend to set traps, but need a trapping license to shoot bobcat, wolverine or lynx.

FWP has suggested a minor, technical amendment to HB 71 to avoid any confusion regarding the last exception. With that clarification, we urge the committee's support of HB 71.